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## **FARM BILL UPDATES**

### **Requests For Proposals**

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is soliciting proposals for assistance in providing program administration services under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and other USDA Farm Bill Programs to New Hampshire Farmers and landowners. Eligibility is limited to state and local agencies, colleges, universities, and other nonprofit organizations.

**Deadline for submission is April 14, 2003.** Applications are available at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mpls/library/forms/forms.html>. Click on "Standard Forms" to obtain these required forms:

**[SF424.pdf](#)**

**[SF424a.pdf](#)**

**[SF424b.pdf](#)**

For additional information contact Gary S. Domian, Assistant State Conservationist at (603) 868-7581, ext. 105.

**Questions about the forms SF424, SF424a and SF424b should be directed to:** Patricia Pickett, Contract Officer, Colchester, VT. at (802) 951-6796; email <<mailto:pat.pickett@vt.usda.gov>>

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service

Administrative Assistance to implement the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and other USDA Farm Bill Programs in New Hampshire.

CATALOG OF DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE NUMBERS: Environmental Quality Incentives Program – 10.912, Wetlands Reserve Program - 10.072

ACTION: Notice

SUMMARY: The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality. Through EQIP, farmers may receive financial and technical assistance to install or implement structural or management practices on eligible agricultural land. EQIP was authorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, P.L. 107-171 (2002 Farm Bill). The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers EQIP with funding provided by the Commodity Credit Corporation. The NRCS anticipates awarding one or more cooperative agreements to provide program administrative services under EQIP and other USDA Farm Bill Programs.

Applicants will be responsible to assist NRCS field staff with program administration in local USDA Service Centers. The objective of EQIP is to provide technical and financial help to producers in planning, designing and implementing conservation practices that contribute to agricultural viability, water quality improvements, soil and plant health, wildlife habitat improvements and other natural resource enhancements. EQIP assists producers in maintaining and/or enhancing their agricultural viability while protecting farm natural resources. Eligible applicants will have thorough knowledge and experience in the achievement of these values.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS: Eligibility to apply for this funding is limited to state & local agencies, colleges, universities, and other nonprofit organizations. Other Federal agencies are not eligible to receive funding under this notice.

DATE: Proposals must be received on or before April 14, 2003, 4:00 PM EST. Proposals received after that time will not be considered. Proposals will not be accepted by facsimile machine submission.

ADDRESS: Applicants must submit one original and four copies of their proposal to Richard D. Babcock, State Conservationist, USDA NRCS, 2 Madbury Road, Durham, NH 03824.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Gary S. Domian, Assistant State Conservationist (603) 868-7581, ext. 105.

## SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

### I. AUTHORITY

Section 1242 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, 107<sup>th</sup> Congress, Report No. 107-424, H. R. 2646, authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to provide technical assistance under this program to eligible producers. The Secretary may request the services of non-Federal entities to assist the Secretary in providing technical assistance necessary to develop and implement conservation programs under this title. The NRCS may do this through entering into cooperative agreements with a technical service provider or other cooperator to stimulate the availability of technical assistance. The proposed rule for administration of this program has not been finalized. Awards resulting from the request for proposal will be subject to the final regulations. Because of the nature of the rule making process, these requirements are subject to change based upon comments received. Applicants whose proposals are recommended for funding must agree to be bound by the final rule as a condition of receiving an award under this program.

### II. DURATION AND TERMS OF FUNDING

All awards are subject to the availability of sufficient funds being appropriated by Congress and apportioned by OMB to support the addition and full cost of services to implement the Farm Bill. Cooperative Agreements will be awarded competitively to eligible state and local agencies, colleges, universities, and other nonprofits for a one-year project for assistance with program administration to increase our capacity to provide assistance under Farm Bill programs. Cooperative Agreements have been determined to be the appropriate funding instrument because of the substantial involvement of NRCS in providing program oversight, coordination and time frames of projects. It is anticipated that approximately \$200,000 will be available for this program in FY 2003. The amount of funds available for this program in subsequent years is not fixed and may vary considerably from the current funding level. Amendments to the agreement(s) may be developed upon availability of funding in follow-on years (approximately a 5-year period).

### III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Natural Resources Conservation Service, in carrying out its assigned responsibilities under applicable legislation, has a need for additional administrative assistance to implement the conservation program activities of the field offices.

- 1) The project involves providing the capacity to assist the NRCS in delivering Farm Bill Programs by reducing the administrative burden of NRCS field staff and enabling them to maximize their technical expertise in the delivery of technical assistance to landowners benefiting from NRCS Conservation Programs. Administrative capacity is needed at the following NRCS field office locations: Lancaster, Woodsville, Walpole, Milford, Concord, Epping and Conway, New Hampshire. The hours for each office may vary from 8 to 32 hours per week depending on the workload to be addressed. Responsibilities and duties to provide program assistance services include, but are not limited to developing and/or maintaining databases of program applicants and approved applicants and authorized

program contracts. Services will also be required to prepare materials needed for contracts; organizing materials for conservation plan and contract development and maintaining workload registers with information from contracts for needed follow-up. In addition, services will be used to establish and maintain program files; report progress using the agency accountability system and assisting in outreach and marketing in relation to Farm Bill programs.

#### IV. INDIRECT COSTS

Section 708 of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, limits indirect costs under cooperative agreements between USDA and nonprofit institutions, including institutions of higher education, to ten percent of the total direct costs of the agreement. Section 708 authorizes an exception to the ten percent limit for institutions that compute indirect cost rates on a similar basis for all agencies for which the Act makes appropriations. If requested, indirect costs must be justified and may not exceed the ten percent limitation or the current rate negotiated with the cognizant Federal-negotiating agency. Applications from colleges and universities must provide a statement in the budget narrative verifying that the indirect costs requested are in accordance with institutional policies.

#### V. SUBSTANTIAL FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT

The USDA NRCS will award cooperative agreements under the RFP. By statute, the Federal awarding agency must be substantially involved in the project to enter into a cooperative agreement to provide assistance. The USDA NRCS anticipates the following involvement, which it has deemed substantial, in carrying out projects funded with Federal assistance provided through a cooperative agreement under this program:

- 1) NRCS will conduct an initial briefing at the NRCS State Office in Durham, New Hampshire within 30 days after the award. The purpose of the meeting will be to review the goals and objectives of the project.
- 2) NRCS will provide a Contracting Officer's representative to participate in the planning and management of the cooperative agreement and coordinate activities between the cooperator and NRCS.
- 3) NRCS will provide, at no cost to the cooperator, training in program and administrative support of conservation planning efforts.
- 4) NRCS will identify and prioritize work assignments at the field office level.
- 5) NRCS will provide office space, computer, software and supplies necessary for each program assistant.
- 6) NRCS will provide for state level coordination/guidance of the program assistants.

#### VI. PROPOSAL CONTENT:

- 1) The application package must be submitted by OMB Standard Form 424 (REV. 4-88, including 424A and 424B), Application for Federal Assistance, with the required information filled in and the certified assurances signed. Forms are attached to this notice. Note that by signing the application form the applicant is providing the required certifications set forth in 7 CFR Part 3017 regarding Debarment and Suspension and Drug-Free Workplace, and 7 CFR Part 3018, regarding Lobbying.

- 2) While the form 424A deals with budget information and Section B identifies Budget Categories, the available space does not permit a level of detail that is sufficient to provide for a meaningful evaluation of the proposed total costs. A budget and a detailed narrative in support of the budget are required for the overall project period. Proposals may include assistance for one or more locations. Show all funding sources and itemized costs by the following line items on the budget form: personnel, equipment, material and supplies, travel and all other costs. Funds may be requested under any of the line items listed above provided that the item or service for which support is requested is identified as necessary for successful conduct of the proposed project, is allowable under the authorizing legislation and the applicable Federal cost principles, and is not prohibited under any applicable Federal statute. Salaries of project personnel who will be working on the project may be requested in proportion to the effort that they will devote to the project. Show any costs that the applicant indicates will be contributed in support of this project. Applicants shall assume that awards will be made by May 16, 2003 and should prepare their application accordingly.
- 3) The application shall include a program narrative statement of not more than 10 pages that addresses the following as a minimum:
  - a) A description of the resources and experience of the organization necessary to successfully perform these services.
  - b) The proposed price per hour for program administration services.
  - c) The organization's level of commitment in terms of the staff, equipment resources, and/or funding support necessary to leverage the project.
  - d) A description of the capabilities to fulfill the terms of the cooperative agreement, including a brief description of the organizational entity and of the qualifications, employment status, current responsibilities, and proposed level of effort for the project coordinator, and staff responsible for implementation. Resumes for key personnel should be included in the appendix.
  - e) List of past experiences with program administration.
  - f) The application shall include an appendix. Material should be included only when necessary to support information provided in the narrative. Copies of documents, brochures, etc., are encouraged to demonstrate experience, knowledge, skills and abilities.

## VII. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Initially, all application packages will be reviewed to confirm that the applicant is an eligible recipient and to ensure that the application contains all of the items specified in the Application Content section of this announcement. An evaluation committee will then evaluate each application from an eligible recipient. The applications will be evaluated using the following criteria that are listed in descending order of importance:

- 1) Organizational capabilities (40%). The adequacy of organizational resources and experience to successfully manage and perform the project. Share in a common mission that supports natural resource conservation efforts with agricultural producers. Capable of providing in-

- kind contributions and/or other sources of financial support toward meeting the objective of the project. Capable of assuming liability for work performed by the program assistants.
- 2) Project personnel (25%). The reasonableness and feasibility of the applicant's approach for successfully achieving the objectives of the project within the required time frame.
  - 3) Understanding of the intent of the Environmental Quality Incentive Program and other USDA cost-share programs (25%). The applicant's recognition of the value and need of the project and the full understanding of the intent of EQIP.
  - 4) Ability to receive clearance from NRCS for network access as well as client data files; Ability to demonstrate past history and credibility of working with farm clients (10%).

## VIII. SPECIAL AWARD SELECTION FACTORS

After evaluating all applications received, in the event that insufficient funds are available to award to all meritorious applications, NRCS will consider the following special award factors in the award decision.

- 1) Priority will be given to the applications from organizations that share in a common mission area.
- 2) Priority will be given to applicants who have the highest probability of providing in-kind contributions and other sources of financial support.
- 3) Priority will be given to organizations that have the highest probability of credibility among farm clients and integrity to receive clearance for network access and client files. Ability to demonstrate that client data will be utilized and maintained in a confidential manner.

## IX. SELECTION

Each proposal will be evaluated and ranked in accordance with the evaluation factors listed above. Discussions may be held with each applicant regarding the applicant's experience, the proposed plan of action or alternative courses of action. After selection, NRCS will enter into negotiations with the selected applicant(s) to discuss cost and the terms and conditions of the cooperative agreement to be signed. The cooperative agreement will identify the USDA Field Office(s) to be served.

## X. TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THE AWARD

- 1) By signing this agreement the recipient assures the Department of Agriculture that the program or activities provided for under this agreement will be conducted in compliance with all applicable Federal civil rights laws, rules, regulations, and policies.
- 2) The cooperator will attend an initial briefing to be held within 30 days of award.
- 3) Within 30 days after the initial briefing, the cooperator shall deliver a detailed action plan and schedule for accomplishing the project. The action plan and schedule will be based on the priorities established by the NRCS.
- 4) Other Federal statutes and regulations that apply to this program include, but are not limited to the following:

7 CFR Part 3—USDA implementation of OMB Circular A-129 regarding debt collection;  
 7 CFR Part 1, subpart A—USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act;  
 7 CFR Part 15, subpart A—USDA implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;

7 CFR Part 3015—USDA Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations, implementing OMB directives (i.e., Circular Nos. A-102, A-110, A-21, A-87, A-122) and incorporating provisions of 31 U.S.C. 6301-6308, as well as general policy requirements applicable to recipients of Departmental financial assistance;

7 CFR Part 3016—USDA Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Government;

7 CFR Part 3017—USDA implementation of Government-wide Debarment and Suspension (nonprocurement) and Government-wide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace;

7 CFR Part 3018—USDA implementation of New Restrictions on Lobbying. Imposes prohibitions and requirements for disclosure and certification related to lobbying on recipients of Federal contracts, grants, cooperative agreements and loans;

7 CFR Part 3019—USDA Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals and Other Non-Profit Organizations;

OMB Circular A-21—Cost Principals for Education Institutions;

OMB Circular A-87—Cost Principals for State, Local and Indian Tribal Governments;

7 CFR Part 3052—USDA implementation of Audits of States and Local Governments and Non-Profit Organizations.